

**Talking Points for Dr. Aaron Stern
Closing Ceremony of the
3rd Regional Course on Governance and
Disaster Risk Reduction
The Sulu Hotel, Quezon City
Friday, September 5, 2008, 1545H-1630H**

Acknowledgements:

(Names to be provided later)

Good afternoon!

- I am pleased to join you today on behalf of the United States Government to be part of the 3rd Regional Course on Governance and Disaster Risk Reduction, organized by the Asian Disaster Preparedness Center (ADPC).
- I work for the U.S. Agency for International Development or USAID. USAID is the agency of the U.S. Government that administers the U.S. foreign assistance program including its disaster relief activities. One of my most important roles in the USAID Mission in the Philippines is to serve as "Mission Disaster Relief Officer" - I am responsible for helping coordinate U.S. disaster relief assistance.
- Though I am the Mission Disaster Relief Officer, relief is only part of the story in disaster work. Disaster prevention, preparedness and mitigation are critical tasks which the U.S. Government has supported for many years in the Asia-Pacific region. The development of this excellent course which you have just completed is an effort USAID has been pleased to support.

- The Asia-Pacific region has been and will remain highly prone to disasters. Disasters are likely to become more frequent - and perhaps more severe - with global trends including increasing population and climate change. The high urban population densities, rapid growth, and poverty found in most Asian countries further exacerbate the cumulative impact of disasters. It is more imperative than ever to be prepared at the local level. The current situation makes this training course important for the people in your own communities who suffer when disaster strikes.
- The United States Government recognizes and appreciates that all the participating countries represented here today have keen governmental and civil society interest in mainstreaming disaster risk management at the local level.
- Both government and civil society have roles to play in disaster planning and response to implement successful national and local disaster management strategies. I congratulate the ADPC and all the participating countries for taking this holistic approach to disaster preparedness.
- I would like to challenge all the participants represented here today to push forward the agenda of reducing risks at the community level in your respective countries. The local government units have to promote and realize safer communities to protect their constituents from the impacts of disasters.
- No country should rely solely on international help in disaster work, as generous as the

international community can be. Local people and local authorities will know their areas best and serve as the first responders in the aftermath of any disaster. So building local skills and engaging people in hands-on disaster preparedness and mitigation planning are critically important. This will help avoid the unnecessary loss of life and property in their communities.

- It is a distinct privilege for USAID to play a part in supporting the objectives of this very important and timely training course, principally through our Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance's (OFDA) regional grant with ADPC for the PROMISE Program.
- In closing, I would like to acknowledge ADPC's key role in advancing developments in disaster risk management by putting together this very valuable course to build safer communities and sustainable development through disaster reduction.
- I wish you all the best as you prepare to return to your countries and apply what you have learned here in Manila to benefit your communities.

Thank you!